

Odsjek za anglistiku

Filozofski fakultet

Sveučilište u Zagrebu

DIPLOMSKI RAD

The Ethical and Moral Implications of Poverty in *Down and Out in Paris and London* and
Cwmardy

(Smjer: Književno-kulturološki, engleska književnost i kultura)

Kandidat: Kristina Grgurić

Mentor: dr. sc. Martina Domines Veliki, doc.

Ak.godina: 2019./2020.

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1. Introduction

This study of the contribution of socialist novels to the understanding of the issue of poverty in literature is based on two works of fiction: George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and Lewis Jones' *Cwmardy* (1937). Published only four years apart, each novel presents its own approach to the issue of poverty in the 1930s in Britain. At that time, mass unemployment was at its peak and Britain experienced its most profound economic depression of the twentieth century. This paper takes as its starting point the assertion that, in accordance with the rising awareness of social issues, poverty assumed a social and political function in literature. The selection of the novels at hand for this discussion derives from the authors' politically committed literature and their socialist engagement at the time. What is more, both authors were contemporaries who were concerned with the same subject matter.

Using the comparative method, the novels are examined as the examples of the way poverty is presented by two different socialist writers who employed different literary tools to carry their points across to their readers. When constructing the theoretical framework of the paper, Barbara Korte's approach to the issue of poverty is taken into consideration. Korte emphasizes the need for a new analytical approach to the treatment of poverty in literature, which would encapsulate the complex nature of the issue. Relying on Korte's argument, this paper analyses the use of perspective, genre and style, as well as the reasoning behind the authors' choice of subject matter in each novel. The purpose of such analysis is to offer a multifaceted approach to the issue at hand and to argue that each representation of poverty is carefully constructed to serve a communicative function between the authors and their readers.

Furthermore, the relationship between poverty and politics in the novels is brought into question. The aim is to address the function of the political elements presented in the novels to prove that they play an important role in the way the image of poverty is constructed. Additionally, class is presented as another important factor which must be considered, since it is deeply intertwined with various manifestations of poverty in the novels. George Orwell was a middle-class writer, whereas Lewis Jones belonged to the working class. While imagination is limitless, experience is not. The extent of the authors' familiarity with the lives of the underprivileged is directly reflected in the way the narrators describe poverty in the novels. Both authors recognized the unjust treatment of the poor in Britain and aimed to dismantle the myths and misconceptions about the poor which were prevalent at the time.

Together with shedding some light on the terrible living conditions of the poor, the authors promote different political views as means of curing the social injustices of the time.

2. Socialist Writing and Poverty

In her essay titled “Dealing with Deprivation: Figurations of Poverty on the Contemporary British Book Market”, Barbara Korte points out the problems with describing and analysing poverty in literature. For Korte, “poverty literature seems to call for a whole box of analytical tools” (79) for an adequate analysis of the issue. Consequently, Korte singles out three main analytical dimensions that present a more coherent image of poverty in literature: the configuration of lifeworld(s), the configuration through textual form and style and configuring agencies of articulation. Firstly, Korte examines the way the life circumstances and experiences of the poor are presented to the readers, as well as the role of class in depicting poverty. Secondly, Korte analyses the use of voice, perspective and style to evoke a reaction from the readers or present a specific version of poverty. Thirdly, Korte is concerned with the role of agency and authority in the text as a means of constructing or deconstructing certain images of poverty. This chapter examines the textual and extra-textual factors utilized by Korte - more specifically, the first two dimensions of her analysis - to describe the way poverty is depicted in the socialist novels at hand.

2.1 The Authors’ Real-Life Experience and Choice of Subject Matter

In any analysis of socialist writing, it is important to stress the diversity of the works of literature that resulted from it. As Croft points out,

[...] the most obvious feature of the corpus of English writing which we are pleased to call ‘socialist novels from the Thirties,’ is the way that it defies any attempt to label and limit it, characterize and dismiss it, according to any one set of ideas, values, judgments. There were too many novels, by too many different novelists, attempting to do too many different things, in too many different ways, to allow [...] generalization (21).

Socialist novels addressed various subjects, used a variety of different styles and were not bound to any specific class or a type of author. What is more, they often addressed different social issues and were written to serve different functions altogether. Socialist writers¹ saw themselves as messengers of the disenfranchised and this is why the various use of style was so prevalent at the time. However, what all socialist writers have in common is the need to

¹ Writers such as Harold Heslop, John Sommerfield, William Holt and Patrick Hamilton come to mind.

both get their points across to the readers and to shape a unique story in its own right. Each author was inspired by different circumstances and used a myriad of different techniques to better address their subject matters.

As Korte points out, examining the experiences and circumstances which inspired an author to address the issue of poverty in a novel is of great importance since this practice offers “access to the system of values and beliefs from which a text has arisen” (94). This way, the context in which a certain work of fiction was created can be established, as well as the reasoning behind an author’s choice of subject matter. George Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London* describes the lives of the poor in Paris and London who are pushed to the margins of society. For Orwell, the issue of poverty in literature was, at first, something he was familiar with through the works of some of his favourite authors. As Beadle suggests, Orwell “was lavish in his praise of the works of Charles Dickens, Samuel Butler, George Gissing, Mark Rutherford, and Jack London” (190). However, apart from admiring the works of fiction which dealt with the issue of poverty, Orwell’s interest in the subject was also sparked by his experience in Burma, where he served as a policeman. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell connects his actions in Burma with an insufferable sense of guilt he needed to rid himself of:

For five years I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience. Innumerable remembered faces - faces of prisoners in the dock, of men waiting in the condemned cells, of subordinates I had bullied and aged peasants I had snubbed, of servants and coolies I had hit with my fist in moments of rage [...] I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate (179-180).

The injustices Orwell witnessed and took part in during his service in Burma, influenced him greatly. Orwell was so troubled by what he experienced, that he felt it necessary to find a way of alleviating his conscience. As Orwell suggests, he needed to break out of the confines of imperialism and the myriad of forms of oppression that come with it: “I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 180). Aside from being familiar with the subject of poverty from other works of literature, Orwell’s motivation to become a socialist writer was undoubtedly shaped by his personal experiences.

By rejecting all systems of oppression and inequality, Orwell became aware of the need to not only study the victims of such systems, but also to become one of them and share their experiences. Upon his return to England, Orwell decided to turn his attention to the study of tramps and vagrants in London. As Beadle points out, “Orwell began the first of his expeditions into the slums of the East End of London in the autumn of 1927. These intermittent excursions, some of which were of three- or four-weeks’ duration, continued for a period of roughly five years and provided the material for the English chapters of *Down and Out in Paris and London*” (190). In this paper, only the descriptions of the tramps and beggars in London are examined and compared to the descriptions in *Cwmardy*, since the analysis is focused solely on the descriptions of the poor in England at the time. What Orwell ended up producing was a novel which sheds some light on the horrific life experiences of the extremely poor in England at that moment in time.

Before the role of poverty in the novels at hand can be examined, it is important to offer a definition of poverty. Poverty is a historical social construct, which constantly interacts and overlaps with other issues such as race, class, gender and ethnicity. Aside from being defined by malnutrition, Spencer-Wood and Matthews define poverty as not only a “lack of shelter, and health care, but also the lack of a job and schooling, powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom, fear for the future, and living one day at a time” (1). As one might expect, poverty can affect various social groups in different ways. In *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell examines not only the poor who are unemployed and find illegal ways to earn money, but also the poor who are employed, but do not earn enough to sustain themselves. In general, Orwell describes the struggles of the working-class poor and those affected by extreme poverty, such as tramps and beggars. According to Sengupta, extreme poverty “has been viewed as the lack of income or purchasing power to secure basic needs” (85). Additional emphasis is put on the “extreme form of deprivation” (Sengupta 86) that those living on the verge of existence experience on an everyday basis. In *Cwmardy*, Jones is focused primarily on the experiences of the employed and unemployed working-class poor. The various levels of poverty described by the authors point to the complex nature of the issue.

Another key factor which affected Orwell’s writing is his relationship with class. As Korte points out, to examine the way poverty is depicted in any novel, the role of class must be taken into consideration (79). For Thompson, class is defined as “a social and cultural formation, arising from processes which can only be studied as they work themselves out over

a considerable historical period” (11). While society and culture can over time affect the formation of class and even sustain or abandon its function in everyday life, in this analysis the term cannot be used without its implications of economic division. Consequently, the definition of class offered by Williams must be examined as well. Williams defines class as a complex term which signifies a hierarchical, economically based social division (69-70). Williams also considers the historical aspect of class, since he acknowledges the term’s complex meaning and evolution over time in response to various social changes (28). In this paper, the term *class* is used in a broader sense, which heavily relies on the definitions offered by both Thompson and Williams, since it is treated as a culturally dependent social division based on economic hierarchy.

When describing the characteristics of different classes in Britain, Orwell places himself within the middle class: “I am sufficiently typical of my class, or rather sub-caste, to have a certain symptomatic importance. I was born into what you might describe as the lower upper-middle class” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 153). Even though the term *middle class* has been defined and re-defined through history, in this paper the term is used in accordance with the explanation offered by Williams, where middle class is referred to as simply being in between the upper-class and the working-class (51). The class Orwell belonged to is of importance since it is precisely the middle-class readers Orwell attempts to address in his novel. As Orwell points out in his discussion on “The Proletarian Writer”, “[So] long as the bourgeoisie are the dominant class, literature must be bourgeois” (33). Being a representative member of the middle class himself, Orwell was able to recognize the attitudes about the poor among the other members of his own class. Moreover, he was able to address them as his equals and gain the trust of his readers. This way, he aimed to influence a shift in social perception of the poor, which was to ultimately lead to the betterment of their living conditions.

The authors’ different class experiences directly affected their different approaches to poverty in their novels. While Orwell’s encounters with poverty were planned and periodic, Jones was a full-fledged member of the oppressed working class. Not only were their experiences with poverty different, but they also wrote under different conditions. As Hilliard points out, working-class writers had no place of their own to write in peace (37). The members of the working-class lived in claustrophobic conditions at the time and could not retreat into a separate portion of a crowded, loud house they usually lived in. As Orwell points out, “to write books you need not only comfort and solitude - and solitude is never easy to

attain in a working-class home - you also need peace of mind. You can't settle to anything, you can't command the spirit of hope in which anything has got to be created, with that dull evil cloud of unemployment hanging over you" (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 82). What is more, writing was also not seen as a job among the working class. According to D. Smith, Jones wrote *Cwmardy* "during odd moments stolen from mass meetings, committees, demonstrations, marches and other activities" (21). The same cannot be said about the middle class, where, as Hilliard suggests, whenever one would retreat somewhere to write, everyone would immediately understand that the person was working (37). With no place to retreat and focus solely on writing, as well as having to work aside from it, the different writing conditions must be considered as well, since they were prevalent among most of the working-class writers and they affected their process of writing.

In their novels, both Jones and Orwell challenge the need for a class-based society, therefore it is also necessary to mention that both authors refer to class as an artificial and imposed concept that needs to be abandoned in the future. In "The Proletarian Writer", Jones states that "the class distinctions in a country like England are now so unreal that they cannot last much longer" (32). The growing polarization of the British society was difficult to overlook, especially in the 1930s, when the number of unemployed people was unmistakably high. According to D. Smith, in 1937, the number of unemployed working-class people rose by 40 percent (17). In "The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius", Orwell calls England "the most class-ridden country under the sun" (50) and compares it to a dysfunctional family that

[...] has rich relations who have to be kow-towed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income. It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. Still, it is a family [...] A family with the wrong members in control - that, perhaps, is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase. (50)

The prevailing class consciousness of the time was identified by the authors as another issue that needs to be resolved if the image of poverty is to be reshaped. Williams defines class consciousness as a vague "self-description and self-assignation to a class scale" (55). Throughout the paper, the term is used in the same sense. The workings of the governing

system of the time depended greatly upon class and social hierarchy. As a result, the interests of those in power were protected on state level, and the poor were pushed to the margins of society.

Unlike Orwell, Lewis Jones did not turn to writing socialist novels out of a sense of guilt. Even though both authors demonstrated admirable amounts of sympathy and understanding for those less fortunate, their different approaches to the issue of poverty stemmed from equally different life experiences. As D. Smith points out, Jones was an unemployed member of the working class (1). For Williams, the term working-class is used to describe an economic relationship that implies a productive or useful activity in exchange for wages or salaries and this is the definition used for the term in this paper. As a member of the working class, Jones was aware of the injustices the workers had to face because of the unfairly low wages they received for their work. According to D. Smith, Jones' "own life seemed, for a time, to be intertwined with these struggles of the unemployed" (14). For over a decade, Jones too was unable to find work and he became intimately acquainted with the many faults of the governing system in Britain, which made it impossible for a member of the working class to earn enough money to lead a financially stable life.

As D. Smith points out, all his life Jones was politically active in his community but "being a miner is what made him a writer" (23). At the time when the experience of the working classes had yet to be properly explored, Jones was moved by his political beliefs into describing the everyday lives and struggles of the miners in South Wales. Jones' transition from a miner to a socialist writer was a gradual one. As D. Smith points out, "It was writing, or, at first, articulation of experiences through public speech, that allowed Lewis Jones the means of making sense both of his, and his community's being" (23). Driven by his own experience of being a miner and a member of the working class, Jones turned to politics and writing as an answer to the issue of poverty in Britain. It was in this context that Jones produced *Cwmardy*, his first acclaimed novel. For Jones, the issue of poverty was closely intertwined with the miners' struggle for fair wages, which he describes in the novel. The struggle is very much class-based and therefore depends on the rejection of class before any change can be achieved. Even though the miners are willing to fight to improve their living conditions, the presence of various tensions between the working class and the middle class make it difficult for them to achieve their goals.

Even though working-class writers did not always agree in their politics, what they did agree on, was that there existed political value in writing about the everyday lives and experiences of the working class. According to Hilliard, the “common denominator of these authors’ depictions of working-class life was an impulse to present accurate portraits of their ‘own people,’ to correct the stereotypes and distortions produced by authors from other classes (such as Orwell)” (58). For working class writers, it was of great importance to offer their own interpretations of what it meant to function within and be a member of the working class. As Korte points out, in the analysis of poverty one must pay attention to the “issue of containment of poverty in niches” (79), whether those niches pertain to a certain class, race, ethnicity or gender. Being written about by other classes or people who did not share their life experiences no longer seemed acceptable to the working class at the time. As Hilliard points out, the working class did not care to be studied and written about as if they were a different people altogether, who come from an unknown, foreign country and therefore must be examined accordingly (58).

While in his novel Orwell targets the middle-class audience, in *Cwmardy Jones* addresses the general public, as he wanted to change the attitudes of both the middle class and the working-class people. As a result, the entire political system would be brought under scrutiny. As Bell points out, in their novels, the working-class writers had a specific goal in mind:

It is apparent from the comments of the writers themselves, from their mode of utterance and in part from their reception, that the audience to which they tried to appeal was wider than the mining community. The novel was intended to function in the gap of understanding between the lived experience of these communities and the executors of power, whose conventional wisdom had failed to remedy their ills. (49)

In *Down and out in Paris and London* Orwell describes the complexity of the issue of poverty and explains what such an experience entails. However, in *Cwmardy Jones* is not as focused on explaining the experience of poverty, as he is on simply describing it. The reason behind this difference in approach is that in his novel, Orwell is mainly focused on the identification of the troubles of the poor, while in *Cwmardy Jones* is more focused on demanding a change of the governing system in Britain and treats poverty as a symptom of bad politics. As von Rothkirch points out, “in Jones’ analysis, the lack of freedom generated by capitalism encompasses workers and owners” (8). Therefore, for Jones, the only solution to the question of poverty is the revolutionary change of the entire system.

2.3 Poverty and politics

The authors' focuses on different forms of poverty directly correspond to their different political beliefs and ideas promoted in the novels. After all, "people's attitudes to poverty could also be shaped by the extent to which poverty is a social issue" (Barrientos and Neff 109). Both Orwell and Jones viewed poverty not only as a social, but also as a political issue and the purpose of their novels is to present poverty as an all-encompassing, serious social issue. Therefore, the effect their different political beliefs had on the way they constructed the image of poverty in their novels must be examined as well. When discussing the role of politics in poverty literature, Korte examines the misery memoir as a genre which has "a political impetus, and it certainly provides a space where people who have experienced poverty themselves are granted a space (both in the text and on the book market) to speak about this poverty themselves" (85). This is accomplished by offering detailed descriptions of the everyday struggles of the poor (Korte 85). As a result, an invested emotional response is elicited from the readers to the fate of the poor. Therefore, such literary practices secure the authors with an opportunity to present and promote their own views on the causes of poverty, as well as to be taken more seriously by their readers. When an author aims to promote a certain political or social agenda in a novel, such an outcome is invaluable. This is why both *Down and out in Paris and London* and *Cwmardy* utilize the same literary practice. The outrage and discontent of the narrators with the way the poor are treated can be identified as belonging to the political dimension of each novel.

The writings of both Orwell and Jones cannot be separated from their political activism in the 1930s. According to D. Smith, Jones was the youngest ever Chairman of the Cambrian Lodge of the South Wales Miners Federation, a charismatic political speaker and an organizer of many demonstrations (10-13). However, it was his leading role in several Hunger Marches to London that made him so popular among the working classes. Jones's dramatic rallying speeches against unemployment earned him a prison sentence and a dose of notoriety in his community (D. Smith 15). For Jones, not being politically engaged was simply unimaginable. As D. Smith points out, "it never seems to have occurred to Lewis Jones that his conduct might just not be politic. It was unthinkable not to be political and he never wavered from his commitment to the Communist Party" (8). Accordingly, Jones' political agenda is the main theme in *Cwmardy*. As previously mentioned, Jones addresses poverty only as a symptom of a diseased political system, which needs to be overthrown.

Without a doubt, Orwell too was an avid political writer. In his essay “Why I Write”, Orwell admits he was driven by the “Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people’s idea of the kind of society that they should strive after. Once again, no book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude” (10). Consequently, in his novels Orwell does not shy away from discussing politics. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Orwell was no stranger to the use of novels to promote a certain idea. In the essay “The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda”, Orwell admits that “the writers who have come up since 1930 have been living in a world in which not only one’s life but one’s whole scheme of values is constantly menaced. Under such circumstances, detachment is not possible. You cannot take a purely aesthetic interest in a disease you are dying from” (89). As Orwell suggests, the 1930s society not only accepted a discussion of socialist issues in literature, but it also demanded it as a response to various external circumstances.

Much like Jones, Orwell traced the roots of the social injustices of his time back to the governing system in Britain. This is why at the end of *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell points out how a change in legislation could improve the living conditions of beggars and tramps:

At present there is all manner of legislation by the L.C.C. about lodging-houses, but it is not done in the interests of the lodgers. [...] There is no law to say that the beds in a lodging-house must be comfortable. This would be quite an easy thing to enforce [...] The lodging-house keepers should be compelled to provide adequate bedclothes and better mattresses, and above all to divide their dormitories into cubicles (87).

Such suggestions may seem trivial at first, but they go a long way in improving the overall experience of being homeless. Raising the standards in the way the poor are treated not only helps the poor, but also benefits the entire society since it exposes and aims to correct its chronic inability to care for all its members equally. Admittedly, people cannot ignore that which is killing them once they’ve identified the symptoms of the disease. To fight any problem, one must first expose it. Both Jones and Orwell took it upon themselves to locate and unveil the various root causes of poverty in Britain.

In *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell’s exploration of the lives of those at the very margins of society began with beggars and tramps but was later expanded to include the experiences of the working-class poor as well. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which was

published in the same year as *Cwmardy*, Orwell describes his experiences with the mining communities of South Wales. Orwell was tasked with writing about the communities by his publisher, who sent him there to investigate the living conditions of the unemployed miners. When describing the working-class poor in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell employs the same tactics as in *Down and out in Paris and London*. More specifically, he again offers detailed descriptions of the everyday lives of the poor and discusses their inadequate living conditions. In *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell emphasizes the importance of securing a respectable accommodation for the poor, which would help turn a tramp “from a bored, half alive vagrant into a self- respecting human being” (84). Consequently, Orwell imagines a communal workhouse which would provide the tramps with some stability and break the cycle of idleness and aimless roaming about. In such workhouses, the tramps could grow their own food and restore their sense of worth:

The workhouses would develop into partially self-supporting institutions, and the tramps, settling down here or there according as they were needed, would cease to be tramps. [...] By degrees, if the scheme worked well, they might even cease to be regarded as paupers, and be able to marry and take a respectable place in society (85).

The same idea is revisited in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, where Orwell realizes that even such workhouses would not be enough to help the poor in a meaningful way.

While examining the existing movements and projects which offer the unemployed poor everything Orwell envisioned earlier in *Down and out in Paris and London*, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the author points out that such places are not a tenable solution to the issue at hand: “Most of the Socialists I have talked to denounce this movement [...] to give the unemployed small-holdings. They say that the occupational centres are simply a device to keep the unemployed quiet and give them the illusion that something is being done for them” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 83). As a result, Orwell turns his attention to the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, which “is a revolutionary organisation intended to hold the unemployed together, stop them blacklegging during strikes and give them legal advice” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 83). As Orwell points out, “If this movement could be combined with something along the lines of the occupational centres, it would be nearer to what is needed” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 84) to improve the living conditions of the poor. Based on the author’s realization that to truly help the poor, a change must be made on a larger scale, one may suggest that in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell builds on the solutions he examines and

proposes in *Down and out in Paris and London* and further develops his ideas to fit a more substantial, complex solution to the issue of poverty – socialism.

Consequently, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell also overtly promotes socialism as a means of ridding the country of injustices and aiding the poor. The entire second part of the novel is dedicated to the development of his socialist thought. The detailed and unnerving descriptions of the suffering of the poor in the first part of the novel serve as an introduction of a sort to the necessity of introducing socialism into the English society. As Orwell points out, “before you can be sure whether you are genuinely in favour of Socialism, you have got to decide whether things at present are tolerable or not” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 153). The version of socialism that Orwell promotes was described by his editor Victor Gollancz in the Foreword to *The Road to Wigan Pier* as “emotional Socialism” (23). What Gollancz refers to is a special kind of socialism which would shape the society in such a way that resolving poverty and any other form of oppression or injustice would be considered a moral obligation, instead of a matter of politics or personal choice. As White points out, “Orwell's professed goal is not to theorize socialism but to humanize it by appealing to the most basic and self-evident values, and he found these values among the working poor” (79).

For Orwell, emotional socialism was a means of fixing the disproportionate distribution of wealth in England. His goal, however, was not to undermine any class since, as previously mentioned, all forms of oppression appalled him. The improvement of the living conditions of one class was not to be made at the expense of another. For this reason, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell proposes a gradual transition from a class-based society to a classless one: “The only sensible procedure is to go slow and not force the pace” (200). Bearing all this in mind, one can argue that *The Road to Wigan Pier* comes as a natural extension of the research Orwell began in *Down and out in Paris and London*. For Newsinger, “The Road to Wigan Pier can be seen as a product of his interaction with the more radical and revolutionary elements” (9), which were present in the working-class movements of the time.

Unlike Orwell, in *Cwmardy* Jones presents communism as a means of achieving equality and abandoning a class-based society in England. However, in the novel Jones is not concerned with making any initial suggestions on how to improve the living conditions of the unemployed poor, but he immediately opts for describing the need for a change on a larger scale. As a result, Jones promotes a revolutionary and rapid transition into a classless society.

As von Rothkirch points out, “for Jones, the system was beyond repair and he had no patience with gradualist reformers” (8). In the novel, the narrator connects the revolutionary nature of the working class with the ability to rid themselves of poverty: “[...] if our people have the power to win strikes even against bullets and batons, they have the power to do away with their poverty, to put an end to the struggle and begin to live clean, healthy lives” (401). The story of Len Roberts begins in *Cwmardy*, and continues in *We Live*, Jones’ second novel. Much like Orwell, Jones further develops his ideas on how to rid the English society of poverty and injustices in his following novel. The “intuitive socialism present in *Cwmardy*” (Del Valle Alcalá 153) becomes a more evolved “Party socialism – i.e. Communism” (Del Valle Alcalá 153) in *We Live*, where Jones presents a more united mining community that takes on even more communist traits in its fight against the ruling capitalist system.

In the novels at hand, both authors describe their characters not only as individuals, but also as representatives of a certain group. As Buttry suggests, in *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell’s characters “are ‘class’ characters” (225). In the novel, the narrator refers to the poor he encounters as belonging to a certain type of people: “There is such a hopelessness about some of the people there – decent, broken down types” (65). However, while some characters are described as representatives of a certain group of people or an experience, that is not to say that all characters in the novel are devoid of any individuality. What is more, Orwell describes several characters in great detail and presents them as unique individuals who are worth getting to know, to paint a more authentic picture of the experience. In the novel, the narrator encounters several beggars with peculiar or interesting characteristics, such as Paddy and Bozo. Paddy is described as being very religious and having admirable moral standards: “[...] he was a good fellow, generous in nature and capable of sharing his last crust with a friend; indeed, he did literally share his last crust with me more than once” (*Down and out* 63). On the other hand, Bozo is described as an artistic and intriguing individual who has no interest in religion or respect for various social norms: “He was ready to extract every penny he could from charity, provided that he was not expected to say thank you for it. He [...] was an embittered atheist” (*Down and out* 68-69). The purpose of describing some characters as representatives of a certain type of people and others as unique individuals is to shed some light on the diversity of experiences among the poor. More specifically, the goal is to humanize the poor and make them seem more relatable to the readers.

Similarly, in *Cwmardy* the characters only have social relevance when they are “articulated as class-relevant figures” (Del Valle Alcalá 143). This is why Jones describes some of his characters as representatives of an entire group of people. For example throughout the novel, Len embodies the revolutionary spirit and willingness of the miners to fight for a better future, while characters such as Will Smallbeer represent those who are reluctant to join the movement right away, but are later taught a lesson on the importance of unity: “Will, much less cocksure after his experience, broke in: ‘Say straight what you do mean, mun. You do want me to join the federashon, is that it?’ [...] If that be it, then I give in, muniferni, and will join next Saturday” (297). However, the characters are still given motivations and characteristics of their own. As a result, characters such as Big Jim and Dai Cannon are presented as charismatic individuals whose strength and charm earn them respect from those around them. Consequently, Dai Cannon is described as a man with “explosive eloquence. A self-taught man, he could quote the Bible chapter and verse, and although he spoke the idioms of the pit with his workmates, he possessed an extensive vocabulary that enabled him to talk on equal terms with anyone when the occasion demanded” (11).

By presenting the characters as representatives of a certain experience, Jones draws attention to the fact that the described struggles are not specific to any individual, but that they affect entire groups of people. This practice enabled the author to bring an entire class forward and use it as an example of the problems many were facing at the time. In other words, having several characters in the novels represent whole communities was a calculated move. According to Bell, in 1930s a miner represented:

[...] a working-class archetype. More than with any other occupational group in the 1930s, the coalminers represented the failure of industrial Britain. From a pre-war position of being the source of Britain's wealth and power and of being at the forefront of the industrial struggle, active in the creation of the labour movement, coalminers now faced high unemployment and widespread poverty (3).

Therefore, by describing the struggles of a mining community in *Cwmardy*, Jones was able to present the problems many members of the working class habitually faced, as well as the fact that the governing system was failing not just one class, but the entire society. Furthermore, the miners at the time were inexorably linked with various strikes and marches, making them already the carriers of revolutionary thought in the minds of many.

2.2 Poverty in Literature - the Use of Genre, Style, Theme and Narration

The various literary tools an author uses in a novel must also be examined, as they play an important role in the way the image of poverty is constructed. According to Korte, the choice of form and style is of great importance, since it “has a significant impact on readers’ potential reactions and attitudes concerning poverty – voyeuristic pleasure as well as pity and outrage” (80). Additionally, the way an author uses perspective and voice to present an image of poverty should be examined as well (Korte 80). Each literary tool is used with a specific goal in mind. Therefore, special attention must be given to the authors’ use of style, perspective and voice in the novels at hand.

When Orwell’s exploration of poverty is concerned, there is no doubt that he based his novel on actual, first-hand experience. This piece of information was of outmost importance to his readers, since many of them never experienced poverty themselves. By producing a text which depicts in detail the experiences of the downtrodden, Orwell was able to attract his readers through the promise of a genuine, truthful account of the experience of poverty. Orwell’s journalistic style of writing earned him several nicknames, such as “the 20th century’s foremost documenter of the ‘misery of the present’, the gloomiest prophet of the ‘nightmare of the future’” (Vaninskaya 14), or the “clear-eyed teller of unpleasant truths” (Marks 266), to name a few. Such descriptions of Orwell testify not only to the faith his readers had in his ability of presenting a captivating account of poverty, but also to the impact he had on the way poverty was perceived by his contemporaries.

According to Beadle, Orwell always occupied himself with the question of poverty: “The dehumanizing effects of poverty and the multiple consequences of economic injustice are the primary or secondary themes of nearly all of his books and occupy a sizable portion of the substance of his political journalism” (188). Since the issue of poverty was of such importance to Orwell, it comes as no surprise that, when conducting research for his novels he went to great lengths to examine it. In the novel, Orwell’s focus is not on creating an artistic atmosphere, but on offering an accurate depiction of his experience. Therefore, according to Capshaw, Orwell chose an empiricist approach to the matter at hand: “Orwell the empiricist was in evidence not only when he draws up atrocity tables but also when he records the weather (down to the wind speed and temperature). Nothing was exempt from his analytical mind, and even pleasurable activities were collated, measured” (13). In *Down and out in Paris and London*, the narrator makes sure to list everything in great detail: “They paid us sixpence each, and we bought a threepenny loaf and half an ounce of tobacco, leaving fivepence” (79).

The practice of writing down every little detail is another element that made Orwell's account seem so trustworthy to his readers.

Despite writing in some autobiographical elements in *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell makes sure to direct the attention from himself to the subject of his research – the poor and the social outcasts. As Buttry points out, “even though Orwell himself is the narrator, he endeavours to be the window pane: ‘the narrator is not the subject; he is barely evident. The teller of the story almost never appears before the reader and he is never celebrated. This self-effacement is quite to the purpose, for the book has a theme, not a hero’” (226). The captivating and shocking descriptions of the poor are at the centre of the novel: “You cannot conceive what ruinous, degenerate curs we looked [...] flat feel, pot bellies, hollow chests, sagging muscles – every kind of physical rottenness was there. Nearly everyone was under – nourished, and some clearly diseased” (62). The narrator offers comments on the described events but does not try to incorporate himself into the novel in any other way. It is the idea of what poverty truly looks and feels like that Orwell is trying to capture for his readers, and everything else comes second.

Even though the narrator took part in many of the situations described in *Down and out in Paris and London*, his investigative lens remains pointed at those around him without fail. Throughout the novel, this is how Orwell uses perspective and voice. According to Korte, this practice “demonstrates the significance of perspective and voice in the portrayal of poverty as it hovers between different personal pronouns: an autobiographical ‘I’ and a ‘you’ that both generalises and addresses the reader” (Korte 91). The narrator assumes the role of an instructive guide throughout the novel. For example, the narrator ranks the lodging-houses and explains how one can make use of them in practice: “The best are the Rowton Houses, where the charge is a shilling, for which you get a cubicle to yourself, and the use of excellent bathrooms. You can also pay half a crown for a ‘special’, which is practically hotel accommodation” (85). The purpose of such a practice is to educate the readers on what it means to be among the poor. What is more, the narrator uses the pronoun *we* to further emphasize the shared nature of the experience of being poor between himself and other tramps: “Evidently the tramps were not grateful for their tea. And yet it was excellent tea [...] I am sure too that it was given in a good spirit, without any intention of humiliating us; so, in fairness we ought to have been grateful – still, we were not” (59). In this example, the narrator relies on his belonging to the group of tramps he describes to point out that even charity can have a harmful effect on the poor, since it only deepens the animosity between those who

offer charity and the ones who receive it. Through such use of perspective and voice, the narrator firmly establishes the poor as the main protagonists of the novel and leaves the readers with an impression that the events described in the novel truly stem from an intimate familiarity with poverty. Everything Orwell does in his novel is to make sure that the focus never shifts from the horrid experiences of the poor.

When reporting on the living conditions of the poor, Orwell juggles the use of empirical information and detailed descriptions to shock his readers. As White points out, Orwell's "book, just as with his whole oeuvre, has to oscillate between this efficient documentary reportage and the more imaginative expression of human misery and despair" (86). Considering in detail the sufferings of others allows the readers to identify with the described poor. Orwell's descriptions in the novel are so vivid that the readers can almost smell what the narrator is smelling: "The doors opened, letting out a stale, fetid stink. At once the passage was full of squalid, grey – shirted figures, each chamber – pot in hand, scrambling for the bathroom" (61). As A. Smith suggests, the discomfort with which the observers relate to the described poor stems from the fact that "the misery of those wretches affects that particular part in themselves more than any other; because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner" (10). Therefore, the use of such descriptions plays a vital role in the process of eliciting emotions and sympathy in Orwell's readers. The goal is to knock the dust and cobwebs out of the minds of the readers and spark their interest in the struggles of others.

In *Cwmardy*, the relationship between autobiographical elements and fiction takes on a different form than the one in *Down and out in Paris and London*. As a result, determining the novel's genre can be challenging. The novel follows the life of Len Roberts, a member of a mining community in the late nineteenth-century South Wales. Len's transition from an innocent child into an adult revolutionary member of the industrialized north is a storyline in accordance with the *Bildungsroman* form. For Smith and Watson, "the *Bildungsroman* has been regarded as the novel of development and social formation" (189) of a young character. This is in accordance with how the term *Bildungsroman* is used in this paper. On the other hand, D. Smith claims that the autobiographical features of the novel are too dominant to be ignored and he draws a comparison between Len and Lewis Jones himself (9-10). Furthermore, *Cwmardy* undeniably contains elements of political activism as well, and it cannot be denied that it also shares some features with the working-class novels, whose

“uninhibited realism was intended to shock and to force the attention of their readers on the plight of the poor. In these novels the exploitation and the exploited were described, the oppressors and the oppressed identified” (Von Rothkirch 39). It stands to reason that since the novel deals with the struggles of the working class, the elements of a working-class novel are present as well. Finally, Jenkins claims that “*Cwmardy* creates a hybrid form to which the generics of Bildungsroman, veiled autobiography, socio-political history, and family saga are manipulated and contribute in a dynamic, if fragmented, form” (65). This contention adequately encompasses the novel’s features and is therefore used as a point of reference in this paper as far as the novel’s genre is concerned.

The trouble with both *Cwmardy* and *Down and out in Paris and London* lies in the fact that they can both be found on the blurry line which separates facts and fiction. As Anderson suggests, “Autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find it. [...] if the writer is always, in the broadest sense, implicated in the work, any writing may be judged to be autobiographical” (1). It is no secret that both novels at hand carry a certain complexity as far as genre is concerned. Both Orwell and Jones produced works of fiction based on their own experiences with poverty. As Anderson suggests, there is “no easy way to locate the historical referentiality of writing” (Anderson 15). Accurately assessing the entirety of another person’s life after it is complete is a difficult, if not an impossible task. Therefore, this paper makes no attempt to identify the autobiographical elements in the novels and is instead focused solely on the way poverty is portrayed in each of them. Personal experiences of the authors are taken into consideration only as moving forces, which inspired them to take notice of the subject of poverty and as a means of legitimizing their works in the eyes of their audiences. The true value of these autobiographical elements for this paper pertains only to the amount of attention they secured for the social issue at hand.

According to D. Smith, Jones’ “attempt to write narrative prose about a collective working-class experience was seen by some as a central, neglected endeavour, for all its stumbling failures, and by others as a major conceptual breakthrough in the twentieth century novel” (3-4). By placing his focus on the political struggles of the working class, which is also the main theme of the novel, and paying less attention to poetic embellishments or complexity of language, Jones left himself vulnerable to literary criticism. The problem with *Cwmardy* is that it attempts “to conjoin individual emotions with expressions of mass political action, two experiences which at times are not containable within the novel form. The ‘fault,’ [...] is not philosophical but aesthetic” (Bell 13). However, the real value of Jones’ novel lies in his

intimate knowledge of the Rhondda Valley history and tradition. As D. Smith points out, “the force of his theme, and its attendant dramas of politics and work, breaks down the barriers of an arch literacy in its own stylistic interests” (37). Whatever faults one may find in Jones’ style are overshadowed by the importance and impact of the main theme of his novel.

In *Cwmardy*, the narrator serves as an authorial figure whose function is to make sense of the described events and ultimately persuade the readers to adopt the underlying ideology of the novel. Throughout the novel, it is the narrator’s task to reiterate the impressions characters get from an event and how it should be perceived or understood by the readers. This repetition is another tool that Jones utilizes to promote the development of a political consciousness in his novel. The narrator moves through the story together with the characters and points to the immediacy of a need for change in the way society is organized.

In their novels, both Orwell and Jones address the function of newspapers in shaping public opinion about the poor. Both authors point out that the image of the poor which was being presented in the newspapers at the time was false. As Marks suggests, “Orwell was adept at using periodicals to promote his own arguments” (275). Consequently, in his novel Orwell uses newspaper headlines which he subverts to further solidify his representation of the poor. In *Down and out in Paris and London*, the narrator mentions that the “stories in the Sunday papers about beggars who die with two thousand pounds sewn into their trousers are, of course, lies” (70). The purpose of such a claim is to remind the readers that the image of the poor they are used to read about is false and that such notions must be abandoned in the future. Similarly, Jones relies on the use of newspaper articles in his novel to emphasize the need for a redefinition of the image of the working class that was being shaped by the newspapers published throughout the country. According to Bell, “Lewis Jones also resorts to the didactic technique of using ‘outside information,’ in the form of newspaper reports, to clarify not only journalistic bias but also the class nature of the event. This contrast is expressed in two types of discourse. On the one hand there is the ‘true’ version of the novel, and on the other the story ‘concocted’ by the press” (111). In *Cwmardy*, the newspapers create an image of the working class which is then being presented to the public, but it does not correspond to the actual events that took place in the novel. During the workers’ strike in the novel, the characters quickly discover that their version of the events which transpired is being manipulated by the press and turned into something it is not: “Ben smiled sarcastically at Len’s attempts to swallow back his rising rage. ‘You understand what you are now, and you also know what happened last night.’ ‘But it’s all lies, it’s not true,’ Len blurted out. Ben

looked at him reproachfully. ‘The papers never lie, my boy. What you see in black and white is true, and you must always believe it’ (229). Based on the disparity between the actual events that took place in the novel and what is being reported by the press, both Len and the readers are able to establish a precedent as far as the newspapers and truthfulness are concerned. The lesson learned is that the newspaper reports are not to be trusted and that the only reliable source of information are the people who take part in the events themselves.

3. Poverty profiles

In this chapter a comparison is made between the way poverty is described in *Down and out in Paris and London* and in *Cwmardy*. While Orwell describes both the lives of beggars and tramps, Jones is focused mainly on the struggles of the working class. However, in their novels both authors discuss the role of unemployment, hunger, dehumanization and the daily humiliation of the poor. The purpose of this segment of the analysis is to demonstrate how different approaches to poverty are manifested in the novels at hand and to discuss how these different views are interrelated. Relying on the methodological framework provided by Korte, this chapter examines the third analytical dimension of poverty. More specifically, the use of agency and focalization as a means of subverting and resisting certain stereotypical representations of poverty.

3.1 Exposing the Misconceptions about the Poor

As previously mentioned, in his novel Orwell presents a narrator who experiences poverty first hand. Consequently, the narrator assumes the role of an authorial figure, who is mainly focused on giving voice to the poor. Before anything else, poverty is a social construct. Because of this, Orwell’s main goal in the novel is to inspire a change in the way the poor were treated by dismantling the existing negative stereotypes associated with poverty. According to Korte, “Whether the voice created in a text has the power to resist and subvert such images depends on the entire text’s ideological configuration (its sets of values, attitudes and authorities)” (80). In *Down and out in Paris and London*, the narrator presents his values and challenges the various misconceptions about the everyday lives and characteristics of the poor which were prevalent at the time.

Firstly, Orwell's task was to draw attention to those who are often relegated to the shadows, since their struggles are habitually dismissed by the public. As A. Smith points out, the poor are often neglected and ignored in everyday life:

[T]he poor man goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel. Those humble cares and painful attentions which occupy those in his situation, afford no amusement to the dissipated and the gay. They turn away their eyes from him, or if the extremity of his distress forces them to look at him, it is only to spurn so disagreeable an object from among them. The fortunate and the proud wonder at the insolence of human wretchedness, that it should dare to present itself before them, and with the loathsome aspect of its misery presume to disturb the serenity of their happiness (51).

As a writer and a socialist, Orwell chose to draw attention to the unjust treatment of the poor by the general public. This was no easy task, since the issue of poverty is not an appealing subject for everyday conversation. Extreme poverty is not discussed lightly. Furthermore, it is easy to ignore the sufferings of others when one pretends that such problems do not exist. Nevertheless, for some these struggles are a reality, and Orwell makes sure to present them as such.

One of the biggest obstacles in gaining public sympathy and support for the poor was the prevailing belief that the poor themselves were responsible for their condition. According to Spencer-Wood and Matthews:

[...] personal success or failure within the system was culturally constructed by both capitalism and Protestantism as the responsibility of individuals themselves. The ideologies of Social Darwinism and Calvinism scientifically legitimated and sanctified the ideology and exploitative practices of capitalism. These ideologies criminalized poverty and blamed the poor individuals for their impoverishment, thus masking inherent inequalities of capitalism as individual failings (3).

In *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell is careful to transfer the blame for being poor from the victims of poverty to the entire governing system. The author holds the entire society responsible for the mistreatment of the impoverished individuals and recognizes the need to put an end to the way poverty was perceived in the past. As Spencer-Wood and Matthews point out, "Shifting dominant cultural ideologies have stigmatized poverty since at least the medieval period in Europe, when a number of practices developed to legitimate the

criminalization of idle-bodied paupers” (2). When talking about the problems of the poor, one may come to the wrong conclusion that such problems are bound only to some distinctive groups and are not related to wider economic or social institutions. If there is any conclusion to be drawn from Orwell’s research of the lives of the poor, it is that poverty is a multidimensional and complex issue.

Similarly, in *Cwmardy* Jones also questions the adequacy of the existing laws which permitted the perpetual mistreatment of the miners. According to Spencer-Wood and Matthews, “under the guise of maintaining order, the inequalities in the capitalist social order are made invisible to avoid discomforting the powerful capitalists and their middle-class agents who created and benefited from the inequalities by exploiting and underpaying their workers” (4). In *Cwmardy*, Jones makes explicit the fact that the world outside the village is unfamiliar with the struggles of the miners. Therefore, in the novel the general population is easily convinced by the newspapers in the illegitimacy of the miners’ claims against the mine owners. As Francis and Smith point out, when confronting the mine owners and any other opposition, the miners were forced to become such a unified force which “saw the evolving of morality and a code of conduct which extended beyond the law” (62). When it is made obvious that the existing laws offer no justice or protection to those who are forced to obey it, it comes as no surprise that some may choose to challenge it. In *Cwmardy*, the author uses the explosion at the mine to point out that the existing laws only work in favour of those in power. Even though the workers offer proof that the explosion at the mine, which takes the lives of many, was not the fault of the miners but of the mine owners, no justice is served: “The jurymen had all craned their necks forward as an indication that they were listening attentively, and without leaving the court they returned a verdict in accordance with the coroner’s directions” (*Cwmardy* 131). Essentially, what this means is that in his novel Jones not only demonstrates that legality does not always equal morality, but also that the readers should not take the claims of those in power at face value.

In *Down and out in Paris and London*, the poor are not described as hopeless and violent individuals, but as capable, intelligent and resourceful people. Orwell’s goal is to demonstrate that the only real difference between the poor and the general population is their financial income. Aside from that, the author makes it clear that there is no other difference between them as far as human experience is concerned. To demonstrate how it is possible to be poor as well as intellectual and artistic, the author describes Bozo in the novel. Bozo is a screever who, unlike the narrator, does not find poverty to limit his imagination or his ability

to think. The narrator is surprised by Bozo's optimism and intellect: "He spoke French passably and had read some of Zola's novels, all Shakespeare's plays, Gulliver's Travels, and a number of essays. He could describe his adventures in words that no one remembered" (69). Bozo finds beauty in the world around him and values education as a means of escaping the reality of being poor.

Additionally, Orwell addresses morality in the novel to demonstrate that being poor has nothing to do with a personal lack of moral values. In the novel, the narrator describes Paddy as an extremely generous man who does not hesitate to share what little food he has, with those around him. What is more, in the novel Paddy honours his firm moral values even when faced with extreme hunger:

Paddy noticed a bottle of milk on a doorstep, evidently left there by mistake [...] I saw that he was thinking of 'knocking it off' himself. He looked up and down the street; it was a quiet residential street and there was nobody in sight. Paddy's sickly, chap-fallen face yearned over the milk. Then he turned away saying gloomily: 'Best leave it. It don't do a man no good to steal (63).

Paddy's high moral values make him a decent example of the humanity that lies beneath the first impressions. When faced with abject poverty, most outside observers cannot see past it and therefore the poor are defined by nothing else but their financial state. However, people's values are not defined by how much they own, and this is the notion that Orwell attempts to carry across to his readers.

Another interesting issue for analysis in this context is the relationship between freedom and poverty. In the novel, the narrator describes Bozo as a man who has made his peace with being poor and feels no shame for it:

[...] he had neither fear, nor regret, nor shame, nor self-pity. He had faced his position and made a philosophy for himself. Being a beggar was not his fault, and he refused either to have any compunction about it or to let it trouble him. He was the enemy of society and quite ready to take to crime if he saw a good opportunity. He refused on principle to be thrifty. In summer he saved nothing, spending his surplus earnings on drink, as he did not care about women. If he was penniless when winter came on, then society must look after him (69).

Bozo claims to be free from social norms and it is not difficult to imagine him as a rebel who does what he pleases and is not restricted in any way by the expectations of society. However, such a description is an illusion since Bozo is very dependent on society. He finds ways of

sustaining himself within the framework of the system and makes money by being a screever. As a result, his actions and daily movements are limited by the very few ways he has of making money. Poverty restricts and governs the daily lives of the poor. When people's thoughts and actions are primarily focused on getting the next meal or finding a place to spend the night, they are not free, but enslaved by their own basic needs which they cannot satisfy. Everything they do is to earn some money or find food and shelter. In that sense, Bozo is not free from the social system, he is rejected by it. Freedom allows people to choose a certain behaviour, or a lifestyle. However, Bozo's lifestyle is a result of the lack of any other options and therefore it cannot be compared with freedom or resistance to society.

Unlike in *Down and out in Paris and London*, in *Cwmardy* the narrator offers a third-person point of view of the struggles of the poor. The focus is on the experiences of the poor and the narrator assumes an authoritative role in the text. Much like Orwell, in his novel Jones also challenges various misconceptions about the poor, which were present at the time. Firstly, there was the impression that the working-class men are cold by nature. According to Strange, "working-class men have overwhelmingly been portrayed as breadwinners (or idlers), handicapped in the capacity to love and the expression of emotion" ("Fatherhood, Providing" 143). In *Cwmardy*, Jones repeatedly uses Big Jim – Len's father, to demonstrate that such notions about the working-class men are not true. Throughout the novel, Big Jim is kind towards his children and is depicted as a caring and loving character. When Len is injured at work, Big Jim demonstrates his love and concern for him:

'Is your poor little head paining?' he crooned as if he were talking to a baby. Len nodded, but said nothing. Fortunately, the stone had struck him flatwise. Had its edge caught him it would probably have fractured his skull. He tried to struggle to his feet, saying, 'I'm alright now, dad, let's get on with those timbers or we'll never finish.' But Big Jim was adamant. 'You sit here for the rest of the day,' he insisted, wrapping Len in shirts and coats. 'There is a day after today (309).

For Big Jim nothing comes before the wellbeing of his children and his concern for them does not stop at simply earning money and putting food on the table. Big Jim is described as a brave, caring character who often puts the needs of others before his own. His kindness and love for his family is one of the most heart-warming parts of the novel.

Secondly, their pragmatism with death made the working-class people seem outwardly cold. The job of a miner is incredibly dangerous and was even more so in the 1930s. As a

result, getting hurt on the job was nothing unusual to the workers. As Strange points out, a “familiarity with death tended, however, to be confused with ambivalence” (“She Cried” 145). In *Cwmardy*, the narrator proves that this is not the case:

The men’s casual appreciation of the deadly possibilities arising from the timber shortage made him think deeply. He wondered if it were sheer bravery that made the men and boys talk so calmly about the possibility of a horrible death awaiting them in the next few hours. He pondered over this while the men carried on the conversation, and eventually came to the conclusion it was not only bravery that made them talk in the way they did. He felt there existed a callous indifference among them, bred in their knowledge that the pit held their fate in its power and that death and destruction could come suddenly in a thousand different ways (172).

The miners understand better than anyone that the work they do is incredibly dangerous. More importantly, they understand that, if they want to survive, they must keep doing it. The fate of the miners, and of all poor people alike, is that they have no choice but to do whatever they must to secure themselves a source of income. Their matter-of-fact attitude towards death does not stem from a cold nature, but from a universal awareness among them, that none of them can do anything to avoid such work.

Lastly, in *Cwmardy* Jones demonstrates that the conditions the miners live in are not a matter of choice, but of necessity. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell states that “no doubt there are still middle-class people who think that the Lower Orders don’t mind that kind of thing and who, if they happened to pass a caravan-colony in the train, would immediately assume that the people lived there from choice” (64). In *Cwmardy*, Jones demonstrates that the miners are used to living in terrible conditions simply because they have no other choice. By working in the mines, they do not make enough money to afford the bare minimum: “Think of it – a lifetime of hard work ending in debt. Mam do quarrel with you sometimes because you have a pint or two of beer. Christ almighty, don’t you deserve it? Or is it only work we have got to live for” (170). Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that the workers take what they can get and try to make the best out of their situations. However, it would be wrong to assume that they do not, at the same time, hope for something better. The goal of presenting the miners as warm people who have the same reactions and concerns as everybody else is to humanize them in the minds of the readers and to make it clear that being impoverished is not their personal fault. As Sundaram points out, when poverty is concerned,

everyone can fall victim to it (24). Those who do not have a steady source of income are especially vulnerable to its various devastating effects.

Another issue Jones deals with in the novel is the public's response to whose concern it is to help the workers. According to Barford, the dominant belief was that the workers should take care of themselves, instead of asking for help from others, even though they were the least dependent ones in society: "The rich have always been dependent upon the labour of those who are poorer than them: those who farm, cook, clean, and much more. However wealthy people are rarely described as dependent; what is criticised is the 'dependency' of poorer people" (2). Such an attitude is also described by Orwell in his novel, where he points out that the poor are treated with indignity regardless of whether they are beggars or have a job that doesn't pay well (72). Being poor is commonly associated with being a burden to society. In both novels, the authors oppose such beliefs by pointing out that the poor are industrious people.

In *Cwmardy*, the workers are presented as strong-willed people who do not shy away from hard work and do not attempt to take advantage of others in any way. Similarly, In *The Road to Wigan Pier* Orwell points out that the very civilization the English society belongs to is built on the hard work of the miners: "Practically everything we do, from eating an ice to crossing the Atlantic, and from baking a loaf to writing a novel, involves the use of coal, directly or indirectly. For all the arts of peace coal is needed; if war breaks out it is needed all the more" (33). In spite of this, in *Cwmardy* Jones demonstrates that the mine owners have no sympathy either for the hardships the miners face on an everyday basis, or for their struggle to secure their basic rights and freedom.

Another misconception Orwell successfully dismantles is the idea that the poor are violent or deviant individuals. In *Down and out in Paris and London*, the author describes the physical and psychological deterioration which is a result of poverty and which makes it even less plausible to link violence and deviant behaviour with the poor. Paddy is used as an example of the physical weakness and inertness that comes hand in hand with hunger and daily humiliation. The narrator notices that not only Paddy's physical weakness which results from malnutrition, but also the way he carries himself only proves he is no danger to society: "There was something in his drifting style of walk, and the way he had of hunching his shoulders forward, essentially abject. Seeing him walk, you felt instinctively that he would sooner take a blow than give one" (62). It stands to reason that if the daily sustenance of the

extremely poor is barely enough to keep them moving from one shelter to the next, they will not be so quick to jump to an opportunity to commit violent crimes. In the novel, the narrator points out that it is precisely the never-ending malnutrition that makes Paddy feel inadequate: “[...] two years of bread and margarine had lowered his standards hopelessly. He had lived on this filthy imitation of food till his own mind and body were compounded of inferior stuff” (64). Paddy is not only the direct opposite of a typical criminal, but his docile nature also makes him even less likely to harm anyone.

According to D. Smith, what inspired Jones to create *Cwmardy* were the Tonypandy riots (13). The miners in these riots were exposed to extreme malnutrition and poverty. Based on the miners involved in the riots, in his novel, Jones also describes a severely deprived mining village fighting against the oppressive mine owners. However, in the Tonypandy riots the miners lost, among other things, because they could not hold their ground when faced with extreme poverty (Francis and Smith 66). In *Cwmardy*, Jones reimagines the riots, but in his novel, the strike succeeds despite there being hunger and malnutrition among the workers: “I know our people are suffering. I know they are short of food and aren’t strong enough to stand up to these monstrous policemen that are being imported. But we’ve not lost yet. You know the support our men are winning all over the country. Money is coming in greater amounts for our food kitchens” (246). In his novel, Jones points out the need for solidarity and unity in the fight against the mine owners if any strike is to be successful. The strike in *Cwmardy* succeeds because the miners receive support from outside communities and there is no hunger.

However, the importance of malnutrition is examined again, later in the novel when, hunger plays a very important role in keeping the oppressed passive. During the war, when the miners are underfed and underpaid, it is the lack of food and supplies that keeps them docile. In the novel, the miners suffer the horrible conditions in silence and wait for hours in freezing queues for food: “The night seemed blacker than ever as he made his way towards the main street. When he reached the general stores of Mr. Evans Cardi, some fifty or sixty men and women were already queued up. This was not the first time Len had kept the queue all night for his mother to get the rations in the morning” (360). Such conditions are a nightmare for all, but they are accepted because of the circumstances at the time. Without a doubt, any kind of revolt is impossible when the men are starving. The importance of being fed and having one’s basic needs met before any action can be taken is in accord with the way Orwell describes the role of hunger in *Down and out in Paris and London*.

3.2 Dehumanization of the Poor

In *Down and out in Paris and London*, the narrator begins the retelling of his experience of being among the downtrodden by describing the indifference the beggars and tramps are faced with on an everyday basis. In one of the Pennyfields lodging-houses, the narrator describes a quarrel between an old-age pensioner and a stevedore: “It appeared that it was all about a shilling’s worth of food. In some way, the old man had lost his store of bread and margarine, and so would have nothing to eat for the next three days, except what the others gave him in charity. The stevedore, who was in work and well fed, had taunted him, hence the quarrel” (57). What makes the matter even worse is the lack of any kind of understanding or compassion for the poor, no matter how grim their situations are. The pensioner’s desperation and grief were not enough to elicit any kind of sympathy from the stevedore, almost as if he does not perceive the pensioner as a human being whatsoever.

Dehumanization experienced by the poor at the hands of the general public is described throughout the novel. The everyday humiliation the poor experience leaves no room for pride. According to Buttry, poverty “strips a person of his pride and brings about moral decline” (237). In such a state there is nothing to hold on to and a person loses all semblance of hope. As Buttry points out, in the novel “Orwell sees a man who ‘seemed hysterical or perhaps a little drunk’ (the hero of *Hunger* appeared drunk to others). The man gave vent to violent anti-religious statements, and Orwell was shocked to catch a glimpse of him in another room, on his knees, tearfully praying. Orwell ‘realized...that he was starving’” (239). The loss of pride turns into desperation and quickens the moral degradation of the impoverished individual.

In *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell draws attention to the contempt the general public express towards the poor. For example, the narrator describes how tramps are treated by coffee-shop employees even when they have a form of payment for their services:

[...] the little chit of a serving-maid, having seen our tickets and grasped that we were tramps, tossed her head in contempt and for a long time would not serve us. Finally, she slapped on the table two ‘large teas’ and four slices of bread and dripping – that is, eightpenny-worth of food. It appeared that the shop habitually cheated the tramps of two pence or so on each ticket (62).

The beggars and tramps in the novel are either ignored by the public or disrespected by them and in this case, the coffee-shop worker chooses the latter. In the novel, both approaches are presented as being equally common and harmful for the way the poor view themselves.

Since poverty was perceived as the fault of an individual, the poor were often seen as immoral people. According to A. Smith, the accumulation of wealth was often connected with having high moral standards and being more respectable in general (62). Therefore, the poor were accused of being unfortunate because of a lack of a moral compass. For A. Smith, “the disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition [...] is the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments” (61). To vindicate the misguided social morality of his time, in *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell is focused on the promotion of sympathy over the worship of wealth and hopes to appeal to the moral conscience of the nation. Relying on a person’s wealth as a test virtue leaves the poor at an unfair disadvantage.

Unfortunately, what remained unnoticed by the general public at the time was that the majority of the poor resorted to becoming tramps because that was what the law dictated. According to Spencer-Wood and Matthews, vagrancy was legally criminalized in the 1500s in England and as a result, it “segregated poor people from society and required the able-bodied to perform hard labour to develop ‘habits of industry’” (3). Because of this, poverty was made even more difficult to endure since the poor could not sleep outside or ask someone for money. As the narrator explains, in London, one can be arrested for begging and even for sitting in public places: “[...] it costs money even to sit down [...] Heaven knows what sitting on the pavement would lead to in London – prison, probably” (64). In London, the beggars find ways to make it seem like they are not asking for money, but offering various services, such as hawking books, selling toys from a tray and many others. Orwell emphasizes the inventiveness and industriousness of the poor to dismantle the idea that poverty is the result of laziness or the lack of will to find a job and work for a living.

Similarly, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell points out that when discussing the uselessness of others, one must first define what it means to work:

[...] a beggar works by standing outside in all weather and assailing people with requests for money. We might insist that the beggar's ‘work’ is useless; but since when do we really care whether work is useful or not? Under capitalism, there are many useless occupations such as advertising, stock-trading, or selling real estate, but we tend to approve of all of them because we feel that successful money-making is what justifies work and makes it into a good thing (154).

Throughout the novel, Orwell's goal is to demonstrate that the poor are as not lazy or self-serving as they are typically portrayed to be. Despite being unable to find employment, the poor still find ways to earn money and are just as industrious as those who have stable jobs. Thus, Orwell demonstrates that money is not a test of virtue and neither is employment.

As A. Smith points out, nothing upsets people as much as witnessing injustice (10). Therefore, the best way to elicit a response from the readers is to lay bare the everyday injustices the poor experience. In *Cwmardy*, the narrator stresses the miserable fate of the miners: "Isn't it awful that we have to spend our lives with smoke to breathe and coal dust to eat?" (400). Such images serve to humanize the miners and help the readers understand why there is a need to alter the way the workers are treated. According to Francis and Smith, miners "lived in communities that literally dug away their own foundations; it was a work that had no end-product, only an endless round of destruction of the earth and an exporting of its riches whilst they themselves grew more impoverished" (298). Under such conditions, the miners are forced to work non-stop, but this does nothing to rid them of their poverty. If anything, it makes them an even more economically vulnerable group of people.

According to Newsinger, the miners' work was essential "and yet they were underpaid and subjected to humiliating and dangerous conditions at work. One in six miners suffered a serious accident every year and one in 900 was killed. It was a casualty rate equivalent to a small war. They did the most dangerous job in the country" (10). Even though a miner's work was considered essential, the miners themselves were still not appreciated. Unfortunately, at the time there were no laws which prevented the mine owners from exploiting the workers. The result of such treatment was akin to modern day slavery. This is the picture Jones attempts to paint in his novel. In *Cwmardy*, Jones presents a clear image of how one can be employed and still barely make ends meet. This goes to show that poverty can affect various people regardless of whether they are employed or not.

In *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell also addresses the devastating effects of unemployment. As the narrator points out, the worst thing for Paddy is the inability to find work: "Listening to his whimpering voice – he was always whimpering when he was not eating – one realized what torture unemployment must be to him. [...] a man like Paddy, with no means of filling up time, is as miserable out of work as a dog on a chain" (75). In his novel, Orwell makes it clear that unemployment at the time was not the fault of the poor, but a problem which was present throughout the country. What is more, for the poor, being out of

work means having to deal with a perpetual feeling of boredom and uselessness. One can argue that such a state can be just as devastating for the morale as being mistreated or ignored by the general public. For Francis and Smith, unemployment is “a type of social leukaemia” (274), which has a deadly effect on whoever suffers from it. Much like the disease, which targets and destroys the human body, so does unemployment ruin entire groups of people who are affected by it. When an entire community suffers from unemployment, it inevitably disintegrates and falls to ruin because of it. Such comparisons point to the devastating effects of unemployment and to its role in causing poverty.

What is more, in *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell points out that unemployment and poverty are not problems that only tramps and beggars face. During his stay at a spike, the narrator notes that there are many people from all walks of life who have found themselves in the same wretched position: “Some were hardened tramps, recognizable by their sticks and billies and dust – darkened faces; some were factory hands out of work, some agricultural labourers, one a clerk in a collar and tie” (60). In other words, the author demonstrates how unemployment is a problem anyone can face at any time.

Aside from being vulnerable to poverty as a result of unemployment, Orwell also describes the financial troubles facing those who do have jobs, but still do not earn enough money. In the novel, the narrator describes a painter who studied art in Paris, but his everyday job did not allow him to earn enough money, so he was forced to become a screever:

‘My wife and kids were starving. I was walking home late at night, with a lot of drawings I’d been taking round the dealers and wondering how the devil to raise a bob or two. Then, in the Strand I saw a fellow kneeling on the pavement drawing, and people giving him pennies. [...] So on the impulse I knelt down and began drawing with his chinks. Heaven knows how I came to do it; I must have been lightheaded with hunger (71).

Often people equate having a job with financial stability and having options. However, it is not uncommon for people who do have jobs to be impoverished nevertheless. Having a job does not mean that a person is immune to poverty. Admittedly, it is better to have a job with a small source of income than to have no money at all. On the other hand, being on the brink of starvation despite having a job also leaves a person in a hopeless position.

The same idea is discussed in *Cwmardy*. In the novel, Jones describes the troubles with wages the miners face. Even though they are employed, they do not earn enough to secure themselves a decent life. For White, economic inequality is a form of oppression (83).

On top of the unjustly low wages, the miners are also constantly treated as replaceable goods. In the novel, the narrator points out that a hundred men's lives do not have the same value as one tram of coal: "Men be cheap 'nough these days and will soon be dear at ten a penny" (132). Throughout the novel, miners fight for better working conditions and to be paid the bare minimum for their incredibly difficult work. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, aside from the shamefully low wages miners are given for their work, Orwell also describes the dismissive way the miners are treated even when trying to collect their pensions:

Watching this man go to the colliery to draw his compensation, I was struck by the profound differences that are still made by status. Here was a man who had been half blinded in one of the most useful of all jobs and was drawing a pension to which he had a perfect right, if anybody has a right to anything. Yet he could not, so to speak, demand this pension - he could not, for instance, draw it when and how he wanted it. He had to go to the colliery once a week at a time named by the company, and when he got there he was kept waiting about for hours in the cold wind (48).

Such treatment of another human being is unimaginable to Orwell, especially after witnessing first-hand the difficult conditions the miners must work in. Similar example is offered by Jones. In *Cwmardy*, the narrator informs the readers that the mining company was quick to pull the funds from the widows and orphans of the miners who were killed in a mining accident as soon as the dust around their deaths settled (137). Despite having an incredibly dangerous job, the miners cannot count on any kind of support or help from their employers. In fact, throughout the novel, the coal owners try very hard to pay the miners as little as possible, no matter if the sum the miners receive enables them to afford the minimum of food needed to survive or not.

In *Cwmardy*, Jones describes various injustices the miners face at the hands of their employers. When describing the shockingly low wages the miners receive, the narrator presents a sobering image of what poverty looks like for the employed working class:

'Look at me,' he said passionately. 'I have been working over three years. Yet when I lose a month's work because I'm too bad to go to the pit, we get in arrears with the rent and have to owe money for food.' He paused a moment, overcome with emotion. And when he continued in a sad voice the muscles of his face were twitching visibly. 'Cattle are not treated like us. A farmer takes care of his cow when it is bad, but we be no use to anybody.' His voice rose in a sudden frenzy of passion. 'No, not even to our bloody selves when we fail to drag our bodies up the hill to the blasted pit' (169).

When Len falls ill for a month, even though his father works without fail, they struggle to make ends meet. In this case, having a job might seem like a blessing, but when one is forced to work under horrible conditions and at the same time receives little or no money for it, the desperation which comes with such a position is difficult to overlook.

Even after the miners secure the basic minimum pay through strikes, the coal owners take advantage of the wartime crisis to underpay the workers yet again. During the war, the workers are paid and fed even less, but their workload never stops growing. In the novel, the narrator explains that the moment the workers' wages grow, so does the price of everything else:

If our wages have been highered, it is nothing compared to the way which the cost of living have gone up. Not only that, but the company are now charging more than five times extra for coal and we don't get twice as much pay for filling it. Once the price of coal rises everything else follows, and the little bit of extra money given to us is swamped before we have it (376).

Even if the circumstances change, throughout the novel the miners are continually oppressed. The only thing that remains consistent in the novel is the mistreatment of the poor who are at times too weak to stand up for themselves.

4. Rethinking Poverty

Even though both authors describe poverty in their novels, their depictions of the issue vary. This segment of the paper addresses the limitations of each author's experience of being among the poor and examines the incongruous ways the narrators present poverty in the novels at hand. Furthermore, both authors identify several root causes of poverty in their novels. A comparison is made between what each author views as an obstacle to the change in the way poverty is perceived by the English society.

4.1 Limitations of Experience

According to Korte, "the distance and closeness of an author to poor life is an issue frequently raised in the criticism of poverty literature" (80). Therefore, when discussing Orwell's representation of the poor, it is important to mention that his experience of poverty had its limitations. As previously mentioned, Orwell's research into the lives of the poor lasted for roughly five years. However, he did not spend the entirety of those five years living as one of the poor. As Rodden points out, the time Orwell spent living as a tramp during those five years varied in length and frequency (8). Additionally, Orwell began his research in

London, then moved to Paris and back to London again (Rodden 8). In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell even says so himself: “I have described all this in Down and Out in Paris and London (nearly all the incidents described there actually happened, though they have been rearranged) and I do not want to repeat it” (184). The length of his research notwithstanding, Orwell delivered a detailed and compelling account of his experiences of being down and out. However, one must be aware of the shortcomings of his research as they are reflected in his novel. According to Rodden, to have the readers take his work seriously, Orwell had to leave out the fact that “he had a favourite aunt in Paris, made regular stops at home, and took baths and got food at friends' houses in London” (196). This information would do nothing to help change the way the poor were treated by the public of his time, so leaving this part of his experience out of the story was a logical choice.

As the narrator in the novel points out, he never truly becomes a member of the poor: “At present I do not feel that I have seen more than the fringe of poverty” (87). The same could be said about Orwell. Unlike the people he encountered, Orwell could end his experiment at any moment since he had friends he could turn to for help, should he need it at any moment. The truly poor have no safety net and because of that, Orwell could never fully experience what it means to live on the verge of existence. During his research, Orwell could refuse to participate in a certain experience or to put himself in any serious danger. As Orwell points out, “I have been into appalling houses, houses in which I would not live a week if you paid me and found that the tenants had been there twenty and thirty years and only hoped they might have the luck to die there” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 52). While Orwell had the advantage of choice, the poor he encountered did not. This is reflected in the way the narrator describes his experiences with poverty in the novel. True poverty and hunger are crippling and isolating experiences. The description of poverty presented in the novel lacks the sense of immediate desperation and loneliness which follows extreme poverty. Orwell had friends and family to turn to and in the novel, the narrator is usually surrounded by friends or fellow commiserates. The narrator often receives advice from both Paddy and Bozo. Because of the lack of desperation and isolation, the narrator is usually optimistic and never seems to be in true danger of starvation or experiencing any permanent negative consequences of such a lifestyle. Without the company and moral support from the people the narrator encounters in the novel, it would have been impossible for him to find his way on the streets of London and learn to work the system. Having company and a way out of trouble should he really need it, made the narrator safer and luckier than most people faced with poverty.

Based on Orwell's calculated encounters with poverty, the narrator in the novel at times presents a slightly problematic version of poverty. In the novel, the narrator claims that "there is another feeling that is a great consolation in poverty. I believe everyone who has been hard up has experienced it. It is a feeling of relief, almost pleasure, at knowing yourself at last genuinely down and out [...] and you can stand it. It takes off a lot of anxiety" (9). The striking difference of experience is evident in that description. People who are truly down and out find no consolation in the fact that they can take it. Such a sentiment is reserved for whoever approaches the experience as a personal challenge or an adventure, instead of as an unavoidable misfortune that is to engulf that person's entire life. When observed as a situation one can never escape from, it is difficult to find any consolation about or excitement in being poor. What is more, the narrator misunderstands the relationship between poverty and freedom. Freedom from having to worry about the future is different from having no future at all. It is wrong to claim that being abjectly poor and being aware of it takes away any anxiety. The anxiety never goes away, but it assumes a different shape from the one described by the narrator. For those affected by extreme poverty, there is no thought about the distant future because they are preoccupied with the near future and finding the next meal. In that sense they do worry about the future, but their future is of a different kind - much less optimistic and ridden with anxiety.

Unlike Orwell, Jones was a full-fledged member of the working class. As a result, in *Cwmardy* the author's primary concern is not in exploring the experiences of the miners, since he was already quite familiar with them. What he does instead is locate and present all the faults of the governing system which allows the existence of all injustices the miners must face. In the novel, the narrator describes the characters as certain types or representatives of an experience. Len, Big Jim and other miners represent the morally superior working class. Placed in their opposition are the mine owners, who represent the governing capitalist system. Throughout the novel, the miners exhibit a strong sense of solidarity towards each other. Such a sentiment comes as no surprise since the people who go through the same struggles, often build deeper bonds and become more sensitive to a certain shared issue.

On the other hand, in the novel the mine owners are described as having no decency or sympathy for the struggles of others. This is evident in the way the mine owners treat the miners as a group of faceless and nameless people who are easily replaced. In the novel, the narrator describes how the mine owners only care about making a profit and are not bothered by the lives of the miners that may be lost in the process: "This isn't a pit, but a

slaughterhouse,' he began. 'The officials are more like butchers than men. They measure coal without giving a thought to our flesh. They think, they dream, they live for coal, while we die for it. Coal – that's the thing. Get it. Drag it out by its roots. Do what you damn well like with it but get it" (184).

Similarly, when the son of an official impregnates Len's sister and refuses to acknowledge the child as his own, Len's father demonstrates that the values of the working-class people are higher than the ones shared by the officials. Len's sister Jane is not wealthy enough to be welcomed into the official's family. Enraged by the disrespectful official, Len's father rejects the official's entire family and points out that it is not Jane who is not worthy, but them:

Do you believe your father was made an official because he was a good workman? Ha-ha!' The laugh did not sound out of place. It was deep and bitter, giving coherence to the words that followed. [...] 'your father did sell his wife's body for an overman's job.' [...] I am sorry for you. The son of such a man as your father is not fit to enter the family of Jim the Big. I would sooner find the father of my gel's babby in the gutter than in this house (66).

This way, the money-driven officials, as well as the oppressive politics they represent, are identified as the novel's main villains. What is more, Big Jim also demonstrates that human lives should not be judged based on the amount of wealth one possesses, but by the quality of his character. The trouble with this approach is that it ascribes negative characteristics to an entire group of people, instead of to only some individuals. It is wrong to assume that all the poor and underprivileged people believe and act the same. Accordingly, it is wrong to assume that the members of a different social class do so either. Pitting one class against the other does nothing to inspire a change of any kind. If anything, it only makes the situation worse because it deepens the animosity which was already present between them at the time. Both poverty and social inequality are difficult issues to tackle and they demand active efforts from the society as a whole, for any significant change to be made.

4.2 Obstacles to Change

To successfully promote their ideas, the authors must first address the obstacles standing in the way of their views being adopted by their readers. For Jones, the main problem is the prevailing passivity and a lack of rebellious drive among the workers. In *Cwmardy*, the narrator connects the passivity of the workers with the continuous oppression that forces them into the docile acceptance of their condition: "Big Jim merely grunted. 'Ho,

ay. That's just how it be in this old world, boy bach. It have always been the same ever since I can 'member, and it always will be the same.' The casual off-hand nature of the reply drove Len frantic" (168).

Aside from this, Jones also points out how unaware people are of the extent to which their thoughts and actions are governed by outside forces. In *Cwmardy*, this is presented ironically when the characters discuss the unequal treatment of the workers and the mine owners during the First World War:

If the Germans conquer, what have you got to lose? Nothing. Absolutely bugger all. But look at the owners. If the Germans win the war, they stand to lose their pits and everything they have sacrificed so much for in the past. Don't you think they deserve a little compensation now in face of the risk they are running? Let me put it to you like this. If we lose the war you lose nothing unless it's your life – and that does not alter the fact you lose nothing. The owners, on the other hand, stand to lose everything: therefore, they have got to insure themselves against this. So it's only right and fair they should get as much profits as possible now in case they get none later on (384-385).

In the novel, during the war the owners earn even more because the prices of coal are on the rise, but this is not reflected in the workers' wages since they are on the brink of starvation. Though presented ironically, this segment of the novel serves as a reminder that people tend to rationalize any injustice if that is how they have been taught to think. Even those affected by the worst misfortunes learn to sympathize with the wrongdoers and justify their actions. As Orwell points out, an "illusion can become a half-truth, a mask can alter the expression of a face" ("The Proletarian Writer" 46). The very standards of what is just are shaped by those in power. Therefore, people must learn to break loose from what they have been taught to believe and rely on their own sense of morality when making any judgements.

In *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell also describes the extent to which the society people live in can alter their perception of what is right. In the novel, the narrator describes a conversation he had with Paddy about the amount of food which is wasted in workhouses:

Then I told him about the wastage of food in the workhouse kitchen, and what I thought of it. And at that he changed his tone instantly. I saw that I have awakened the pew-renter who sleeps in every English workman. Though he had been famished along with the others, he at once saw reasons why the food should have been thrown away rather than given to the tramps.

[...] ‘They have to do it,’ he said. ‘If they made these places too comfortable, you’d have all the scum of the country flocking into them. It’s only the bad food that keeps all that scum away. These here tramps are too lazy to work, that’s all that’s wrong with them. You don’t want to go encouraging them. They’re scum (81).

In this example, the reader is shown the harmful effects negative notions about the poor have on those affected by poverty. Even though Paddy is starving himself and knows that it is not the fault of the poor that they cannot find work, he still adopts the views the rest of society has of them. Throughout the novel, the author demonstrates that this is not an uncommon practice among the poor. They often view themselves through the discriminating eyes of others. This only goes to show that negative views of the poor are deeply engrained in the minds of the English people. What is more, this scene in the novel demonstrates that even though people are affected by poverty in the same manner, they still attempt to make distinctions between themselves because that is the way a class-based society teaches them to function.

For Orwell, class consciousness is another problem which makes it difficult for people to become more sympathetic towards the sufferings of others. For the middle class, the system works since they are not mistreated by it. Therefore, they are in no hurry to rally against it. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell points out that many “rail against class-distinctions, but very few people seriously want to abolish them” (189). The reason behind this is that people are simply not prepared to seriously commit to making a change. According to Orwell,

The fact that has got to be faced is that to abolish class-distinctions means abolishing a part of yourself. [...] All my notions - notions of good and evil, of pleasant and unpleasant, of funny and serious, of ugly and beautiful - are essentially middle-class notions; my taste in books and food and clothes, my sense of honour, my table manners, my turns of speech, my accent, even the characteristic movements of my body, are the products of a special kind of upbringing and a special niche about half-way up the social hierarchy. [...] I have got to suppress not merely my private snobbishness, but most of my other tastes and prejudices as well. I have got to alter myself so completely that at the end I should hardly be recognisable as the same person (193).

It is far easier for the middle class to organize charity events for beggars and tramps or fraternize with the members of the working class, than to accept that truly helping others entails changing oneself to the core. Essentially, belonging to any class is, in Orwell’s view, a lifestyle. This attitude not only reveals the complexity of the issue at hand, but also offers an explanation as to why it is so difficult to weed out poverty and its various effects worldwide. As Orwell points out, “you do not solve the class problem by making friends with tramps. At

most you get rid of some of your own class-prejudice by doing so” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 186). For those interested in doing away with poverty, being willing to inform oneself about the various struggles the poor face is a solid start. Even so, if people are not fully aware of what they are getting themselves into, they might be disappointed by how little difference their actions can make.

As one might expect, believing that only one person can solve the issue of poverty is ill-founded. As Beadle points out, modern bureaucracy often views poverty as something that can be managed by various policies, and these “reforms from above require large numbers of ‘experts’ and administrators. Thus, what has occurred is the erection and steady proliferation of a vast, extremely expensive, and ultimately self-serving bureaucracy between the comfortable classes and the very poor” (199). The very administrations that are supposed to eliminate poverty only manage it from the above and in doing so secure the status quo. As a result, the presence of poverty in societies worldwide is normalized and accepted as just another part of human experience, instead of being treated as an issue that needs to be fixed. Unfortunately, because of this people are in danger of becoming desensitized to the very real and devastating effects of poverty.

5. Conclusion

This paper proposes a comprehensive analysis of the way poverty is constructed in *Down and out in Paris and London* and *Cwmardy*, as well as the function it plays as an instigator of social change. Relying on Korte’s methodological framework, the paper utilizes three analytical dimensions to examine the way in which the image of poverty is constructed in the novels at hand: the configuration of lifeworld(s), the configuration through textual form and style and configuring agencies of articulation. Consequently, the life circumstances and experiences of the authors are examined, as well as their use of perspective, genre, voice, style and agency. The function of poverty in the novels is analysed to emphasize that the focus of each novel is not on creating an artistic atmosphere, but on examining the issue of poverty and its place in society. While Orwell offers a detailed description of the sufferings of tramps and beggars, Jones describes the everyday lives and struggles of the underprivileged members of the working class. The points of overlap between their descriptions are of special interest since they point to the shared experience of the described groups. Both authors aimed to invoke sympathy in the minds of their readers and inspire a change in the way the poor were

treated at the time. Additionally, the use of outside sources in the novels is examined as a means of legitimizing the narrators' claims in the novels.

Both Orwell and Jones were politically engaged socialist writers, and their political beliefs are taken into consideration to give context to their depictions of poverty. As a result, poverty is presented as an instigator of social change. The novels at hand are examined as the products of social and political circumstances of the 1930s. Furthermore, poverty is defined as an issue which assumes several different forms and affects people from all walks of life. The authors' political ideologies are examined as offered solutions to the issue of poverty. Additionally, the role of class in enabling the polarization of wealth in England is brought to light.

Both authors understood that the issue of poverty is nested within a larger discussion about morality and the society in general. That is the level at which the problem needs to be addressed to achieve any permanent change. Both authors aimed at giving voice to the poor and the oppressed. While describing the injustices the poor face on an everyday basis and inspiring sympathy in the minds of their readers is a solid start, both authors understood that something more needed to be done. In *Down and out in Paris and London*, Orwell offers several solutions that could help the beggars and tramps up to an extent. In the novel, the narrator suggests an improvement of lodging houses and kitchen gardens, as well as some legislative changes. However, these suggestions do not go a long way in solving the issue or poverty. According to Newsinger, Orwell realized that to achieve any permanent change, poverty must be addressed on a larger scale (14). As a result, in his following novels Orwell develops the idea of socialism as a means of reshaping the English society and achieving equality. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the readers are presented with Orwell's fully developed political conscience. While Orwell began his research with an examination of human nature, in his later works he settled for socialism.

Unlike Orwell, Jones was already familiar with the group of people he chose to write about in his first novel. Therefore, in *Cwmardy*, Jones is more interested in developing his ideas on communism. In his following novel *We Live*, Jones presents his readers with the final product of his exploration of communism. In *We Live*, the entire mining community is mobilized in the fight for their freedom and dignity. The two novels combined are almost like a practical manual on how to successfully apply communism in everyday life. The fact that both authors wanted to draw the attention to the mistreatments of the poor, but then realized

that the only way to truly help them was through a radical change of the entire system, proves that poverty is an issue that cannot be solved without extensive effort. What is more, their choice of literature as a means of inspiring change for the benefit of the entire society proves that it plays an important role in the way reality is perceived and constructed.

In their novels, the authors dismantle several misconceptions about the poor to improve the way they are treated by the rest of society. The role of hunger is examined as an important factor which keeps the downtrodden from demanding better treatment. Additionally, the indifference and contempt the poor are treated with is revealed to point out the everyday injustices they must face. Both authors aim to humanize the underprivileged and demonstrate that there is no difference between the very rich and the very poor as far as human experience is concerned. The only real difference is the disparity in their wealth.

Finally, the limitations of the authors' experiences are brought into question. Orwell never truly became a member of those he sought to examine. Similarly, in his novel the narrator expresses some dubious claims about poverty. On the other hand, Jones was a full-blown member of the group of people he describes in his novel. For Jones, distancing his narrator from the animosity between the working class and the middle class proved challenging. Furthermore, both authors locate the various obstacles in the way of solving the issue of poverty and they recognize its complex nature. Even though poverty is a complicated subject to address in literature, there is a rising interest in it today. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that, should one need some guidelines on how to approach the issue at hand, novels like *Down and out in Paris and London* and *Cwmardy* can easily offer some insightful guidance.

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7. Abstract:

This thesis seeks to analyse the role of poverty in two works of fiction - Lewis Jones' *Cwmardy* and George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*. The focus is on the way both authors use the issue of poverty in their novels to communicate their ethical and moral beliefs to the readers. Both Jones and Orwell were political and socialist writers and their contributions to the general understanding of the issue of poverty are examined accordingly. Using the comparative method, as well as the methodological framework provided by Barbara Korte, the novels are examined as examples of the way poverty is presented by two different socialist writers, using different literary tools. In the paper, poverty is examined as a social construct and as a class category. Both authors recognized the unjust treatment of the poor in Britain and aimed to dismantle the myths and misconceptions about the poor which were prevalent at the time. This paper analyses the authors' approach to poverty as a means of inspiring social change. Together with shedding some light on the terrible living conditions of the poor, the authors present different political views in the novels as possible answers to the social injustices of the time. The various levels of the experience of being a member of the poor and underprivileged are used to emphasize the complex nature of poverty. In this way, poverty is discussed not only as a social construct, but also as a complex subject matter to address in literature.

Keywords: comparative analysis, poverty, class, socialist writers, George Orwell, Lewis Jones, Barbara Korte, *Down and out in Paris and London*, *Cwmardy*